

The Harvest of the Earth: Good Deeds

Revelation 14:13-20

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This is our twenty-fourth sermon from the book of The Revelation, and I worry that we forget the big picture and miss a lot of things . . .

Remember that Revelation is *one huge symphony*. At the start we see seven little churches in Asia Minor called to conquer, called to good deeds.

Then we see the slaughtered Lamb sitting on the throne of God. Everything is singing! The four living creatures around the throne *never stop singing*. They sing the whole way through the book. All the creatures on earth, under the earth, and in the sea are all singing to the glory of this Lamb upon the throne.

He opens a scroll and history happens. Once it's opened, we see a woman (I believe she's the people of God) who gives birth to Jesus. The Ancient Dragon then attacks Jesus' family, the Church. Satan is defeated, but he calls up the Beast. The Beast battles the saints and conquers them.

Yet it's clear that the saints conquer by being conquered. We conquer by "the blood of the lamb and the word of our testimony, loving not our lives even unto death." We conquer by living out Jesus' life in this world—sacrificial love.

All at once the saints show up on Mount Zion singing Jesus' song. They sing a *new* song. No one else knows it or can learn it. It's *their* part in the great symphony that never stops. It's the Gospel, the romance of God, Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

We the Church sing it now. For we are to be dead to this world and alive to God. Dead to the Beasts, Dead to the Whore of Babylon, and alive to God, joining in the great symphony even *now*. Heaven is now in faith, and Heaven is a symphony! Heaven is music!

That's interesting, because in places like Afghanistan and Iran, music is illegal.

The world feels such a need right now to point out that Christianity and Islam are basically the same thing. I think maybe that's because they're worried that we won't tolerate Muslims.

At least on the surface there is a striking difference between the two; that is,

Christians *sing a lot*, and Muslims do not. In fact, many Orthodox Muslims do not sing *at all*, for it's forbidden. There's a debate in the Islamic community now about whether or not singing is a sin (that is, "singing" that is any more than chanting the Koran).

Last year on my Sabbatical I read about half of the Koran. It's amazing to me, when I reflect on it, that in the Koran there is no music. There are no songs. There is no poetry. In Sura 26 verse 225 Muhammad writes, "It is the poets whom the erring follow." Yet the *Bible* is just *packed* with poetry (more than you know, because you read it in English). Poetry and songs and admonitions to sing . . . "rejoice always."

If my son Coleman, six years old, were born in Iran or Afghanistan, he would be dead by now. He will *not stop singing*. He sings about *everything* . . . putting on his underwear . . . walking up the stairs . . . it drives us old people nuts! "Stop singing!" He can't help it. There's so much *life* in him it flows out in a song all the time.

They are singing on Mount Zion with the Lamb. And we're singing with them right here. "We've come to Mount Zion" (Hebrews 12).

Revelation 14:13: *And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!"*

. . . their deeds follow them . . . I think that's why a lot of people think world religions are the same.

"You know, it's about good deeds that follow you."

Well, what *are* good deeds?

"Well *you* know . . . like courage . . . laying down your own life for the common good. Like a soldier who would lay down his own life for the good of his country. Like a guy who would fly a plane into a building and die for the good of a billion Muslims . . ."

Ouch. Hear me closely: I'm not saying the soldier (or the fireman, for that matter) and the terrorist are the same. I'm just saying that good deeds might be more than the deed you do.

The president said, "We will cleanse the world of evil. . . . We will, with Operation Infinite Justice." He called those guys who flew the planes and sacrificed their lives in order to cleanse the world of evil and bring the justice of Islam (at least in *their* minds) "cowards." That's confusing. And America is confused. Maybe we should be asking ourselves, "What makes a deed *good*?"

In verse 13 the voice cries out, "Their deeds follow them."

Verse 14: *Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.* (I think that must be Jesus.)

And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe."

This other angel comes out of the temple (*we are* the temple) and bosses Jesus around. Who could this be? I think maybe it's the Holy Spirit calling from our hearts, "Come and get it, Jesus. They're ripe."

So he who sat upon the cloud swung his sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

Matthew 24: "Henceforth you will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven." What's He doing? — reaping.

In John 4:35 Jesus says, "Lift your eyes; the fields are white, ripe for harvest." They are ripe *right now*.

Mark 4:26: "When the grain is ripe, at once the reaper puts in the sickle." Ever since the cross Jesus has been harvesting this earth, His kingdom of good deeds.

So you get the picture . . .

The saints broken and bloodied sing on Mount Zion, and suddenly there is *fruit*. The reaper shows up, and fruit happens.

The Israelites put the choir in front of the army and sing. Broken, humbled slaves walk through the desert, sing, and the walls of Jericho come falling down. And they possess the Promised Land.

Paul and Silas, broken and bloodied, sing in the Philippian jail. The earth shakes, walls come tumbling down, and they evangelize Europe. *That's fruit*.

Jesus, broken and bloodied, sings from a cross the first line of Psalm 22. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He died before he could finish the song, yet in dying He gives birth to a new creation, like a seed dropped into broken, fertile soil.

Isaiah 54: "Sing, O barren one, who did not bear . . . ! For the children of the desolate one will be more than the children of her that is married." *Sing . . . sing* and bear fruit!

In Romania I met bloodied, broken, singing Christians who toppled the government. More importantly, they led a nation to the foot of the cross.

Last week legislators, broken and bloodied, met on the steps of the Capitol and sang a *prayer*: “God Bless America.” And where *was* the ACLU?

In Scripture folks *sing* in hard times, and stuff grows.

Last week I felt bad after preaching, because I felt I didn’t express enough sympathy. (I don’t think you could ever express *enough* sympathy.) I felt bad until I went home and read Luke 12 and 13. Jesus teaches in 12:57, “Be careful about demanding justice for yourselves. If you do, you’ll end up in jail and will have to pay every last penny.”

Then some guy says, “Jesus, did you hear what Pilate did?—a great injustice, a terrorist act. He *slaughtered* some Galileans while they were worshipping in the temple. What about *that*?” Jesus looked at him and said, “Do you think that *they* were worse sinners than the rest?”

I’m sure the guys were thinking, “No . . . wait a minute . . . that’s *not* where we were going with this. We were hoping for a little righteous indignation, you know.” Jesus looks at them and says, “Unless you repent you will likewise perish.” That’s *harsh*. But it gets worse.

He tells them a story about a fig tree that will not bear fruit. The fig tree is Israel. The master says, “Cut it down.” The gardener says, “No, wait . . . I’ll go around the base of the tree, break up the soil, and throw some “koprion” on it. (In the King James Version, “I’ll dung it. I’ll throw some crap on it.”) Maybe it will bear fruit then.”

Listen closely: God loves Israel. And we *are* Israel more than we can possibly begin to even comprehend. Yet it is amazing how broken ground and manure make stuff grow.

Last Friday the construction guys over at the new church came over and got Aram and asked him to lead them in prayer. They ended up having a *church service* in the *sanctuary* of our *new building*. (And it kind of ticks me off, because Aram preached the first sermon in the new sanctuary! But we’ll let it slide because it’s pretty good fruit . . .)

Philip Yancey faxed me last week: Wal-Mart, Amazon.com, Walden Books, and Barnes & Noble all want special edition copies of his book Where Is God When It Hurts? All the proceeds go to help the folks in New York. *That’s fruit*.

They’re singing prayers on the steps of the U. S. Capitol; the president is calling the entire nation to pray, and people are actually doing it. I saw Dan Rather break down weeping on the David Letterman Show over the sacrificial love of those New York firemen. You see, he’s weeping over fruit that looks like Jesus.

And last Sunday I bet there were more worshippers in church in this country than there have ever been. We had about a 25-30 percent increase. Nationwide that must have added up to millions upon millions singing praises to Jesus, who did not sing them the week before.

Keep this in mind:

Not just 6,000 in New York,
but *all* of us will die one day.
It's not a question of *if* you die,
but what song will you be singing when you do?

In Scripture good deeds are fruit. We don't make fruit; all we do is prepare the soil and make sure it's fertile, broken, and humble in order to receive the implanted seed. Revelation 14:13: "Happy [blessed] are the dead who die in the Lord . . . rested from their labor." "Rested" is ari-st subjunctive, as if it could be something that has already happened here on earth. We are to "strive to enter that rest" (Hebrews 4), and good deeds then follow. In Mark 4:26 "the farmer sleeps and the harvest grows. . . . he knows not how." Yes, he works breaking the soil and getting it ready, but it grows while he's sleeping. "Rested from his labor" . . . that is, fruit doesn't happen by your own effort. It's something *God* does, like wheat, like grapes, like children.

There is imitation fruit, and sometimes it's very hard to tell the difference, but the real deal is made by God. Imitation fruit is made by humans.

Last year when I read the Koran I was struck by how human it is. It's this guy Muhammad just talking . . . talk, talk, talk . . . about *everything*. No stories, no songs, no poems. Just advice, law. But the Bible spans thousands of years with many different authors through whom God spoke . . . poems, stories, songs. It's one tremendous story from front to back. And when there is law, it's law to help you understand a person, like a personals ad in the newspaper.

The Koran is just Muhammad talking in the desert long about 600 A.D., 600 years after Christ died, in another country. He says Jesus didn't actually die and didn't actually rise from the dead. That's pretty different from what I believe.

In the Koran good deeds are small. (Sura 47: "Allah wants some but not all of your money.")

In the Koran evil is small, so small that some people are good enough.

In the Koran, because good is small and evil is small, *grace* is small. Allah merciful, but only on those who deserve it. (Sura 4:108—"Allah is forgiving, merciful . . . but loves not those that deceive themselves.")

In the Bible, *everybody* deceives themselves! In the Bible, *everybody* is dead in their trespasses and sins! In the Bible, *no* one is good but God alone! So in the Bible *grace is everything!* For we are all saved 100 percent “by grace through faith, and this not of ourselves, lest any should boast.”

Muhammad taught, don't kill the innocent. Bin Laden teaches, none of those Americans are innocent. Jesus teaches, you didn't quite go far enough. *Nobody's* innocent! And they *all* deserve to die! Yet He died for all.

So we are tolerant, *not* because people are the *same*, but because God has been so furiously, relentlessly tolerant of us.

The Koran struck me as so human. It's exactly what *I* would have written, if *I* was an Arab wanting to unify some tribes and make a kingdom. It's about human energy and human kingdoms, so it participates in human violence yet motivates everyone with other-worldly rewards, that is, big-eyed virgins feeding you fruit on couches in the Garden of Eden. I can see the attraction there, but it's pretty *human* . . . 666, a thoroughly human number.

It teaches, *I* can do it. *I* can pay. I can *buy* some of those heavenly virgins . . . pay for love. Do you know what that is? That's *whoredom*. If I act like I've earned my bride, I make her a whore. Do you think if you're good enough you'll get into Heaven? In Christianity, Heaven isn't just a place; it's a person. And thinking you can pay for that person is the depths of depravity.

Islam is entirely different from Christianity.

But Islam is almost exactly the same as most of that run of the mill American Civic Religion:

“Just do good deeds, and God will let you in.”

“It's not Jesus, the person of God.”

“Just be good, and you can get God's stuff.”

Those good deeds are imitation fruit, man-made fruit, worse than no fruit, a product of Hell.

In Matthew Jesus says His kingdom is like good seed sown in a field, but the enemy has also sown tares—weeds that look like wheat. He says, “Don't try to remove the tares because you'll wreck the wheat. At the harvest they'll be separated.” The harvester knows; Jesus knows . . . but it's very hard for us to tell.

Last week after the service a friend came up to me and put his arms on my shoulders and said, “I agree with everything you said, but I have so many questions. I'm a soldier. I was in Desert Storm.” I don't know if I was anticipating the questions correctly, but I stopped him and said, “I don't think I have the answers.”

A book like the Koran *does*. It will tell you exactly what to do. A book like the Bible—like the New Testament—doesn't really.

So Christians have argued for 2,000 years about whether or not it's a sin or a duty for a Christian to serve in an army and fight in a war. Many have said yes, it's a sin, and they have very deep theological and convincing reasons. Many have said no; in fact, it's a duty to fight if it's a just war under a legitimate government, because God grants the sword to protect its citizens (Romans 13).

I wish we had time to discuss all the views, but in the end maybe God doesn't want us to get the answer from a book. Maybe the answer has far more to do with the disposition of our hearts. So you can't judge the fruit from the outside. Only God can judge from the inside.

So I would suppose that there are pacifists just filled with hatred, pride, and an evil cowardice. And I suppose there are soldiers burning with love for God and love even for their enemies (as Jesus commanded) as well as for those they protect . . . and visa versa.

Maybe good deeds are good because of the song you sing in your heart when you do them. The outside may sometimes be the same, but the Father knows. He knows love songs.

My closet at home is full of videos of musicals, which is strange because I *hate* musicals. But *these* musicals I love, because my kids are in them. They are church musicals and school musicals, and you wouldn't understand them very well because the videos only show the parts where my kids sing, and only my kids in those parts.

Those songs abide on video in the hall closet. And it's not the words that my kids sing out loud (they're the same words as all the others sing, and besides, they're usually off-key), it's that I know my five-year-old is singing them out of a heart that is thoroughly in love with me. They're singing *to me*.

For a daddy, that's the measure of a good deed—a good song.

Did you know that the words to the song of the Lamb—the new song that no one else can learn—appear to be printed in the next chapter? Perhaps it's not the words themselves but the heart with which we sing them as children of God.

My favorite song is:

I love you a bushel and a peck,
A bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck,
A hug around the neck and a bushel and a peck . . .

Only one person in the world can sing it truly. She used to sing it to me in high school. She loved me more than any other guy in the whole world. For a bridegroom, that's the

measure of a good deed—a good song. Now she’s my wife, and that song has born great fruit: Jonathan, Elizabeth, Rebecca, and Coleman.

God is a daddy, and Jesus is *The Bridegroom*. And they both are one farmer growing fruit . . . love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control . . . or as Paul puts it, “faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.” That fruit cannot be grown simply by human effort. You can only prepare the soil, broken and fertile. You can only surrender to the Father, surrender to the Bridegroom.

You can practice notes, you can practice the score,
But if you really want to play the song,
At some point you have to surrender to the song,
And *lose* yourself in the music.

It’s interesting that “Islam” means “surrender.” But most Muslims attempt to surrender to the law—the score . . . to play the notes without hearing the song. A song can sweep you away. You can lose your *self* in a song.

Christians have tried to surrender to the law of God, to playing all the notes. But the score, the law of God, is so demanding that it breaks them—humbles them, and they have to surrender to the love of God, the grace of God, the song of God, *Jesus*. We surrender to Jesus, the person of God, and He romances us. He sings over us until His life begins to grow in us and we *sing back* to Him . . . His life in us bears fruit.

If you say, “Well, I don’t feel like singing,” maybe God in His mercy will come alone and break up the hard soil of your heart . . . maybe even throw some crap on it. You see, people change their song in times like these. Times like these break people and open them to the seed. And Jesus said, “Bear the fruit that befits repentance.”

If you *still* don’t feel like singing, read on . . .

The wheat is harvested—the bread . . .

And another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (I think these are the same two at work, by the way.) Then another angel came out from the altar (which is in the temple), the angel who has power over fire, and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Put in your sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe."

So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God; and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia.

One thousand six hundred stadia is the length of Israel. And it covers Israel . . . the

depths of the horse's bridle . . . enough blood to cover all Israel and indeed to cover the entire earth.

Most commentators say this is simply a picture of judgment on the unbelieving followers of the Beast who have been told they'll "drink the wine of the fury of the wrath of God." In Isaiah and Joel, trodding the grapes is judgment on the enemies of God. Right here it says they are the "grapes of wrath."

So commentators say the grain harvest (bread) is good works that God does. The *grape* harvest (wine) is Satan's evil works. Maybe so, but this passage has *haunted* me this week.

A harvest of evil doesn't make sense. The farmer burns the stalks, the chaff, and the tares, but not the grain. It's the harvest. The vinedresser prunes and burns the branches that won't bear fruit, but not the *grapes*.

In John 15 Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Abide in me that you might bear much fruit." That would be grapes.

The first angel comes from the altar in the temple, which is us . . . the altar where the sacrifices are made in our hearts.

The second angel throws these grapes into the winepress of the wrath of God. Winepresses and grapes make *wine*. Yet this wine flows out and turns into *blood*. Blood that's wine, wine that's blood . . . that sounds familiar.

The winepress is trodden "outside the city" where the sin offerings are made. Hebrews 13:13-16 points out that Jesus suffered *outside* the gate, *outside* the camp, *outside* the city of Jerusalem. That's where the Lamb on the throne of God was slain. And there is a river of blood that flows from that place, enough to cover all Israel and indeed the entire world.

I John 2:2: "He [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world." He *satisfies* God's wrath. And I know we're skirting across theological, incredible mysteries that are far beyond us, but I believe the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God is a cross outside the walls of Jerusalem on which God in Christ bore the sins of the world, suffering his own wrath on our behalf. Now every person ever born must somehow go to that cross, visit the winepress, and see that their sins crucified the King of Glory.

If they hate God and are of the Beast and the Dragon they will drink the "wine of the fury of the wrath of God"—*blood*. If they *love* God they drink the "wine of the kingdom"—the forgiveness of sins.

I know from experience—I've seen this—that communion wine burns the Dragon—Satan—like fire. But to you, children of God, it is the sweet gift of grace, the wine of the kingdom.

Jesus said, “Abide in me that you might bear fruit.” Perhaps that fruit is surrendered lives and sacrificed lives. Yet we were enemies of God, so our lives are infected with sin. But *confessed sin* is the fruit of abiding in Christ. Unless you abide in Christ, you don't even *see* your sins, let alone confess them or surrender your life.

But in repentance and confession, broken and humbled,
He takes our sin to His cross,
He dies in our place, our confessed sins are crushed,
In the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God . . .

Crucified with Christ.

His blood is our wine. It flows from His cross. We drink it—His life blood. Seed enters the broken, humbled soil of our hearts, life begins to grow, and we begin to sing. We join the great symphony.

My children sing love songs to me because I have loved them. My bride sings love songs to me because I have loved her. Why *do* you sing to Jesus? If you don't feel like singing, go to the cross and see the love of God in Christ Jesus for you and for a world. So much sin, so much wrath does Jesus bear, that there is a *river* of blood that flows from that place and fills Israel to the depth of a horse's bridle. Do you get the picture? All those great war horses stop in a river of Lamb's blood.

So if you don't feel like singing, spend some time at that cross, and you'll be broken, you'll be humbled, and you'll begin to sing. And don't be surprised if you see some fruit.

“I don't know how, and it's weird, but I'm starting to love my mother-in-law!
And those cousins from Des Moines!”

How did that happen? Good deeds are *His* life in you.

Bride of Christ, the harvest of the earth is bread and wine, body and blood of Jesus our Lord. He *is* good deeds born of you.

In Islam guys earn virgins in Heaven. In Christianity Jesus wins you, His Bride, with sacrificial love. “You have been saved by grace through faith for good deeds which God prepared beforehand that you should walk in them.” Your good deeds did not save you. What arrogance! *God* saved you for His good deeds.

I think the sin of those terrorists who flew those planes wasn't so much *cowardice* as *arrogance*. And that's familiar.

Islam is all about *us*: dependent on us and our effort. So Muhammad takes us *very seriously*. He's *very serious* and *very grave* and *very dead* . . . and he never sings.

Christianity is about *God*: dependent upon God and His furious grace over us. So Christians must take God *extremely seriously*, so seriously that they sing all the time.

Commanded to rejoice.

One other thing: The reaper has gotten a lot of bad press. But the reaper is anything but grim. Right now I suspect He's dancing on streets of gold, with a whole bunch of New Yorkers, to the sound of all creation praising Him, and to us singing the song of the Lamb. Let's sing and give Him something to dance to, even here.

[Song: "We Will Dance"]

If you've never given your life to Christ Jesus our Lord, or if you're feeling guilty about anything, walk to the cross with me. Say to him, "God, forgive me. Wash me. Cleanse me. I surrender to you."

If you prayed that prayer, do you see how much He loves you? A river of blood flows from that place and washes you clean. In the name of Jesus and under the authority of His blood, you are forgiven. Your job is to *believe it* with everything you have and everything you are. And you will begin to *dance* . . . to *sing* . . . and there will be fruit.

The reaper is your Bridegroom. If you really believe that, you can sing always, like you are supposed to, like Coleman — so much life, you can't help it!

In Jesus' name, amen.

Further Reading

Muslims believe that God has previously revealed Himself to the earlier prophets of Jews and Christians, such as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. Muslims therefore accept the teachings of both the Jewish Torah and the Christian Gospels.

-PBS Website

God is forgiving, merciful. And plead not with Us for those who are self-deceivers; for God loveth not him who is deceitful, criminal. . . . God truly will not forgive the joining of other gods with Himself. Other sins He will forgive to whom He will: but he who joineth gods with God, hath erred with far-gone error. . . . And for their saying, "Verily we have slain the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, an apostle of God." Yet they slew him not and they crucified him not, but they had only his likeness. And they who differed about him were in doubt concerning him: No sure knowledge had they about him, but followed only an opinion, and they did not really slay him, but God took him up to Himself. And God is mighty, wise! . . . O ye people of the Book! overstep not bounds in your religion; and of God, speak only truth. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, is only an apostle of God, and His word which He conveyed into Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Himself. Believe therefore in God and his apostles, and say not, "Three:" (there is a Trinity)—Forbear—it will be better for you. God is only one God! Far be it from His glory that He should have a son!

-Sura IV, The Koran, Muhammad
~600 A.D. somewhere in Saudi Arabia

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. . . . If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.

-I Corinthians 15:3-8, 17
(55 A.D., 22 years after Christ's death, Ephesus)

Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. He who confesses the Son has the Father also. . . . Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already.

-I John 2:22-23, 4:1-3

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Then I looked, and lo, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat upon the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe."

-Revelation 14:13-15

And he said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself, first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

-Mark 4:26-29

“Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest. . . .”

-John 4:35

Another parable he put before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the householder came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then has it weeds?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he said, 'No; lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

-Matthew 13:24-30

"And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right? As you go with your accuser before the magistrate, make an effort to settle with him on the way, lest he drag you to the judge, and the judge hand you over to the officer, and the officer put you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out till you have paid the very last copper." There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Silo'am fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Let it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

-Luke 12:57-13:9

“Bear fruit that befits repentance, and do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. . . .”

-Matthew 3:8-10

So the angel swung his sickle on the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth, and threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God; and the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for one thousand six hundred stadia. . . . He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron; he will tread the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

-Revelation 14:19-20, 19:13-15

(Note: Also read Hebrews 10:13-16 – what happens outside the camp.)

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. . . .”

-John 15:1-5

“The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son”

-John 5:22

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. As this disciple was known to the high priest, he entered the court of the high priest along with Jesus, while Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the maid who kept the door, and brought Peter in.

-John 8:15-16

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. . . . Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

-John 12:24, 31-32

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God-- not because of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

-Ephesians 2:4-10

If you are fortunate enough to be Awakened thus, you will know why the finest language is the one that is not spoken, the finest action is the one that is not done and the finest change is the one that is not willed.

-Anthony DeMello

A saint is not someone who is good but who experiences the goodness of God.

-Thomas Merton, Christianity and Bearing Arms

So clear was the opposition of the early Christians to bearing arms that Celsus, in his famous attack on them, declared that if all were to do as did the Christians the Empire would fall victim to the wildest and most lawless barbarians. In replying, Origen did not deny that Christians were pacifists. Indeed, he said that Christians do not fight under the Emperor “although he require it.” Instead he argued that if all were to become Christians, the barbarians would also be Christian, and that even now, when Christians were in the minority, their love, labour, and prayers were doing more than Roman arms to preserve the realm.

For the early Christians, pacifism was largely theoretical, for they were chiefly from groups other than those from which the legions were recruited and they did not have the responsibility for formulating state policy.

In spite of the general trend among Christians towards pacifism, in the third century the numbers of Christians serving in the legions seem to have increased. This was especially the case on the frontiers, menaced as they were by invasion, and in the West.

Moreover, after the Emperors had espoused Christianity and they and Christian officials were charged with the responsibility for the body politic and for making decisions for the government, the attitude of the majority of Christians towards war changed. Christians now began to believe that some wars are just. That was the position taken by Ambrose. Augustine elaborated the theoretical basis for a just war. He held that wickedness must be restrained, by force if necessary, and that the sword of the magistrate is divinely commissioned. Not all wars are just. To be just, so Augustine said, a war must be waged under the authority of the prince, it must have as its object the punishment of injustice and the restoration of peace, and it must be fought without vindictiveness and without unnecessary violence. It must also be carried on with inward love. Yet without the authority of the prince, Augustine taught, the civilian must not use force to defend even his own life. The clergy and the monks were to be entirely exempt from military service. It was the principle of a righteous or just war which was held by a large proportion of Christians in subsequent centuries.

-Kenneth Latourette, A History of Christianity